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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 002772

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/10/2019

TAGS: PGOV ECON EAGR PINR PHUM ETRD KDEM RS

SUBJECT: SMOOTH RUNNING VERTICAL OF POWER IN KRASNODAR

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Susan Elliott for reasons 1 .4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Longtime Governor Aleksandr Tkachev's efficient, heavy-handed control of Krasnodar Krai has helped the conservative region achieve and preserve political and economic stability, partially by undermining competitors during his first few years in office and preventing potential charismatic figures from rising through the ranks. Krai and Krasnodar city officials maintained high levels of popular trust, which cushioned them against occasional accusations of failing to adhere to the rule of law, corruption, and intimidation of opposition parties, press, and human rights activists. Krasnodar has suffered less than most Russian regions during the economic crisis because the region's strong agricultural and tourist industries have helped offset the economic damage to its locally-based industrial sector. The Governor uses the region's Cossack history as a political tool, but risks a backlash from ethnic groups opposed to the Cossack drive to reestablish Catherine the Great as the symbol and name of Krasnodar city. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) PolOff met with city and regional Krasnodar representatives on November 1-3 to examine the local political and economic landscape in a region that boasts political stability, a relatively strong economy, and which would hold the Winter Olympics in 2014. Krasnodar leaders were focused on maintaining control, preparing for the Olympics, upgrading infrastructure, and using its place as a major vacation destination to ease economic and social concerns. Despite the unusual snowy weather in the Krai's capital Krasnodar, interlocutors greeted us warmly, and welcomed the opportunity to discuss life outside of Moscow's ring road in what some locals referred to as "Russia's California."

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Governor's Firm Political Control Praised  
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¶3. (C) By all accounts, Governor Tkachev's personal touch was instrumental to achieving regional economic and political success. Nikolay Petropavlovskiy, Director of the Krasnodar Krai Sociological Center, which he said was linked to the administration but not controlled by it, stated that Tkachev did not need to enter politics since he already had a fortune, but entered because he wanted to see the region's economy grow. A member of United Russia, Tkachev was popular because he had energy, showed excellent foresight into new investment sectors, successfully courted foreign investment, met with various lobbying groups, attended festivities organized by local Russian Orthodox and Muslim leaders, and listened to voters. Tkachev's strong, polished image was enhanced by the high level of media coverage that he received interacting with "the people."

¶4. (C) Federation Council member and Permanent

Representative from Krasnodar Krai to Moscow Aleksandr Pochinok told us that his selection to the Council was a sign of Governor "Sasha's" inclusive governing approach, especially since Pochinok was a former member of the SPS party and currently was the only member of the Federation Council unaffiliated with a political party. Krasnodar's other representative is from the Communist Party. Longtime friends, Pochinok confirmed rumors that Tkachev often had received offers to work in Moscow, but had turned down requests such as the post of Minister of Agriculture so that he could focus on Krai politics. Pochinok added that Tkachev's popularity and effectiveness could easily make him a candidate to someday work in Moscow. Even the Krai legislature's Just Russia faction head Vladimir Mashkarin said that Tkachev was an effective manager who knew how to get the most out of the region.

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Complaints to Firm Control Remain  
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¶15. (C) Tkachev's rise to the top has not come without the use of tough tactics. Since Tkachev became governor in 2001, Krai authorities slowly neutralized anyone whom they thought could be a political threat to the establishment. Local Novaya Gazeta journalist Yevgeniy Titov said that by August 2004 Tkachev had established personal control of the region by coopting or coercing his political competition. Local Communist Party (KPRF) representative Yevgeniy Rasshchepkin related to us that in 2005 a popular KPRF member ran for office, but was excluded from running because of administrative manipulations. He said that this KPRF

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member's family owned a plot of land, but that everyone in his small village farmed collectively. The profits from the farm were split and his family received a bag of sugar, which the KPRF member failed to report on his income declaration to the Central Election Commission. As a result, the CEC barred him from running for a post in the Krai's legislature.

¶16. (C) Activists who made too many waves continued to be targeted for harassment. Krasnodar's Regional NGO Youth Group for Tolerance Head and Memorial member Anastasiya Denisova was prevented in October from leaving Krasnodar airport to fly to an international conference in Warsaw. Her organization has been raided by local security service officers and she and a colleague were detained in August by customs officials for seven hours while they were on their way home from Abkhazia. Novaya Gazeta journalist Titov provided other examples of human right colleagues who had experienced pressure from the region's authorities to temper criticism or else their organizations or businesses would be shut down. Titov said that he had received threatening calls from unknown people telling him to discontinue his work on political and human rights stories. He said that he felt he could write almost anything about Krasnodar, but was careful not to go "too far." Titov added that he sometimes feared for his life because he believed the authorities were not providing him "protection" from those featured in his investigative journalism, but that Krasnodar was relatively safe compared to other southern Russian regions he covered such as Ingushetiya, Chechnya, or Dagestan.

¶17. (C) Representatives from KPRF, who have five members in the Krai legislature, Just Russia, with three members, and Right Cause, with zero members, seemed demoralized that they could stem the dominance of United Russia in the region. UR held 61 of the 70 seats in the regional legislature and could pass anything they wanted. Opposition members claimed that UR often used ideas put forth by the opposition as their own. All representatives noted, however, they frequently cooperated across party lines since they often knew each other on a personal level. Right Cause members said that it was even easier to cooperate with local representatives of other parties than it was to work with Right Cause leadership

in Moscow.

¶ 18. (C) Sochi's Olympic preparations have also become a source of friction for Krai and Federal leaders. In the past, Sochi has often had a higher federal status than it does now, separate from the rest of Krasnodar Krai. Sochi residents resented the control Tkachev has exerted over Sochi and the Olympics, and have derided what they refer to as the "Krasnodar Olympics." Contacts told us that Tkachev has pushed for Krasnodar and Krasnodar Krai companies to be involved in Olympic construction projects, although they have been received with mixed results.

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Diversified Economy Provides Barrier to Crisis  
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¶ 19. (C) Krasnodar Krai boasts mountains, beaches, farmland, orchards, sea, snow, and excellent weather, with some residents having labeled it "Russia's California." Pochinok, who has visited California more than a dozen times and reminisced about driving along its coastal Highway One, cautioned that the quality of goods, services, and infrastructure remained far below the level of California's. The region also lacked quality educational establishments that would help create a local Silicon Valley.

¶ 110. (C) Krasnodar Krai's tourist industry and agricultural base has spared it the most severe effects of the worldwide economic downturn. Krai officials estimated that at least 12 million people had vacationed in the region in 2009, which was an increase over the previous few years. They suggested that the economic downturn resulted in more Russians choosing cheaper domestic vacations rather than going to Egypt, Turkey, or Dubai. The region's Black Sea coast boasted a number of popular resorts, and that the Krai was upgrading transit and service infrastructure in anticipation of the 2014 Olympic Games in Krasnodar Krai's southern city of Sochi. Krasnodar continues to be one of the Russian Federation's most productive agricultural regions. Officials provided statistic after statistic of products, such as wine and rice, that were grown almost exclusively in Krasnodar's warm climate. Other locally-grown staples, such as grain, seeds, milk, as well as all types of fruit and vegetables were always going to be needed since people "had to eat, but did not always need industrial products."

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What's in a Name? Beautiful, Red, or Catherine?

¶ 111. (C) Several locally important issues were tied to Russian and Soviet history, meaning they were hotly debated topics. Krasnodar, which means "beautiful gift," or "red gift" depending on the translation, was originally called Yekaterinodar, or "Catherine's gift." Catherine the Great gave the land where Krasnodar now sits to Cossacks in 1794 in order that Moscow could better manage the then frontier. The area was generally anti-Bolshevik during the civil war, and the Bolshevik victors quickly renamed the city Krasnodar. The main Cossack organization in Krasnodar is extremely politically active and has established a political alliance with Governor Tkachev. They have restored Cossack monuments destroyed during Soviet times, and called for the city's name to revert back to Yekaterinodar. Initially, Governor Tkachev cautiously backed these efforts, but was publicly and vocally rebuffed by residents. Most interlocutors stated that they opposed the change on practical rather than ideological grounds. Titov and others argued that the Cossacks represented less than 10 percent of the electorate, and that Tkachev was wise to reverse course and move slowly toward a possible future name change.

## Ethnic and Religious Tolerance, Within Limits

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¶12. (C) Despite problems experienced by a few minority ethnic and religious groups, all interlocutors noted Krasnodar's ethnic and religious tolerance, particularly in comparison to nearby Caucasus regions. One reason for the tolerance was due to the fact that the Adygeya region, which has a sizable Muslim population of approximately 20 percent and was established as an ethnic republic from the center of Krasnodar Krai, was seen by many in Krasnodar as the "region for Muslims." Everytime we asked about the number of mosques in Krasnodar city officials pointed across the river dividing the two regions and responded that there were many mosques in Adygeya. The local human rights ombudsman said that a delicate balance had been achieved between the various ethnic groups and religious confessions, and nobody wanted to rock the boat by building religious buildings where they would create problems. Other factors for the region's ethnic and religious calm were the region's resources and economic strength. When people have jobs, interlocutors replied, they were less inclined to cause mischief. Finally, Tkachev's firm grip on the region precluded alternative centers of power that might exploit differences between Russian and non-Russian nationalities, religion, or economic status.

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Comment  
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¶13. (C) Krasnodar, in many ways, reflects the Federal vertical of power Putin created over the last decade. Krasnodar Krai and city authorities established stability, economic growth, and conditions for the domination of United Russia, but did so at the cost of limiting society's ability to debate policies openly and criticize excesses. Tkachev, though by all accounts popular, tough, and trustworthy, is the driver of these policies and his possible future move to Moscow, rumored for years, would open the way for policy and governance changes, for better or for worse, on the local level.

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